



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
in the Apartheid Museum during  
the state visit to the Republic of South Africa  
Johannesburg/South Africa,  
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Just now, I toured the Apartheid Museum's exhibition. It was deeply moving. The signs above the entrance doors say "Blankes – Whites" and "Nie-Blankes – Non-Whites". Passing through beneath them is an impressive, oppressive experience.

I was also struck by a piece of paper bearing handwritten dates and names. On that piece of paper, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela recorded which members of his family visited him, and when, during his time in prison in the 1960s. The list is short; he was only allowed a visit every few months. This piece of paper, too, is a shocking documentation of injustice and suffering.

Here in South Africa, you are celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nelson Mandela's birth this year. Without him, your country would be a different place today. And the world would be the poorer.

I am very aware that, as a guest from Europe, as German President, I do not need to tell you what Nelson Mandela means for the new, democratic South Africa. But I do want to talk about what he means to me, and to very many people in my country.

Nelson Mandela is a shining symbol of reconciliation and humanity. He is a role model, both as a statesman and as a human being. Personally, that is very much how I regard him. Because, although regrettably I never met him, I see him every day!

For many years, a famous portrait of him by the Berlin-based photographer Jürgen Schadeberg, who documented the anti-apartheid movement, accompanied me from office to office. And now it hangs in my private office at home in Berlin. You all know the photo, and you can see it here behind me. It shows Nelson Mandela in his cell on Robben Island, his elbow on the sill, his gaze towards the horizon full of energy and hope.

Even when it seemed so very far off, Mandela always believed in his vision, the vision of a democratic, united South Africa where everyone enjoyed the same rights, irrespective of skin colour, gender, religion or social standing.

One of those who fought with him for freedom was George Bizos, a great lawyer and human rights defender, and never one to shy away from a debate. This room is named after him. We are surrounded by many of his photos, and he wanted to be here in person today. Unfortunately, he fell ill and was unable to come. However, his family is here. And I am sure that we would all like to send him our best wishes for a speedy recovery!

It truly was a long walk to freedom for you and your country. In the end, the inhumane apartheid regime was overthrown, but not without violence and unimaginable suffering along the way. The regime locked Nelson Mandela away for 27 years. It destroyed his life, his family, his love. There was only one thing the regime could not destroy: the human being Nelson Mandela. Never did he allow himself to lose hope, not once in almost three decades of imprisonment. On reading his "Prison Letters" recently, which have now been published in German, I was once again overwhelmed by this.

Well do I remember 11 February 1990, the day he was finally released, when the world held its breath. He, who had every reason to seek revenge, did not want revenge. He wanted reconciliation. There was only one road to the future, he said then, and that was peace. He reached out to his oppressors in just such a spirit of peace, and that is his superhuman, his historic achievement.

The dream of free, secret ballots for all eventually became reality. Your country celebrated, and the world celebrated with you, when in 1994 Mandela became the first democratically elected President of South Africa. Madiba had become a symbol of hope – for South Africa, for Africa, for the entire world. How wonderful to have the opportunity to remember him together here today!

Just a few weeks after his release, Nelson Mandela came to Germany for the first time. He had been invited by Willy Brandt, himself another of the great statesmen of the last century. Brandt, too, was a profound admirer of Nelson Mandela. But he had not been allowed to visit him when on a visit to South Africa. His delight was therefore all the greater on that day in June 1990. "Nelson Mandela, you are among friends here," he called out. These two men were bound by their efforts towards reconciliation and peace, and by their belief in a better, fairer world. They both received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work.

This meeting between Brandt and Mandela was preceded by various events that link our countries.

Just a few weeks before Mandela's release, the Berlin Wall fell. And it is no coincidence that only a few weeks separated these two events, on 9 November 1989 and 11 February 1990.

Both here in your country, on the Cape of Good Hope, and at home in Berlin, something rare was happening: the history of our countries was taking a turn which most of us would have believed impossible.

In South Africa the inconceivable happened; to many, it seemed like a miracle: Nelson Mandela was released, and after decades of oppression and violence, your country embarked on the road to democracy.

And something inconceivable happened in Germany, too: the fall of the Berlin Wall at last brought an end to the division of my country. Ultimately, and likewise peacefully, thanks in particular to Chancellor Kohl's policies, a democratic Germany emerged in a united Europe.

Whenever we recall this historic development today, we also invariably remember the boldness and civil courage of those who fought at the time for freedom and democracy – the many here in South Africa, and also the many in the east of Germany. Without these pioneers, we would not be here. And, even if histories can never really be compared, we can perhaps nonetheless understand something of what these courageous pioneers achieved for us and for which we are today so happy and grateful, each of us in our own country.

There is, however, something else that binds us, that is closely related to our historical experiences: our democratic constitutions. It may just be a coincidence of history, but both were adopted on 8 May – our Basic Law in 1948 and your Constitution in 1996. What is no coincidence, however, is this: our two constitutions are regarded – rightly, I would say – as among the best and most progressive in the world. Because they are both based on this principle: human dignity is inviolable. That, too, unites us. We can be proud of our constitutions.

All of this notwithstanding, we must not forget that the gratifying turns in our countries' destinies would not have been possible without the end of the Cold War, without the freedom movements in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. And they would not have been possible without the support of our international partners, who followed our countries' progress over decades.

I believe that this not only gives us reason to be thankful for what has passed. It also holds a lesson for the future, namely that we all need partners! Without multilateral cooperation we will not be able to master the major global challenges. And only if we work together can we shape globalisation more fairly. In the next few years we will have the opportunity to approach this in a very concrete way. Germany and South Africa will be on the United Nations Security

Council together, and I hope that we will make use of this opportunity to work together on peacekeeping, climate and security, as well as health and security. Let us, South Africans and Germans, show that the world does not become more peaceful with "everyone against everyone else", but only through increased cooperation. Unfortunately, by no means everyone still sees things this way.

In 1996, Nelson Mandela paid a second visit to Germany, this time as President. His address to the German Bundestag contained this unforgettable sentence: "We celebrate with humanity the wonder of creation: that the best can come from the worst."

The best can come from the worst. This sentence applies to South Africa, but it also applies in a very particular way to my country's history.

It is only a few days since we in Germany commemorated 9 November. For us Germans, 9 November is a date which stands both for light and darkness.

The first German republic was born on 9 November 1918. But it failed. The citizens themselves helped the enemies of democracy to gain a majority in July 1932. Thus began the most terrible chapter in my country's history.

It was also on 9 November, this time in 1938, that the synagogues burnt to the ground, Jewish businesses were looted, Jewish citizens abused and killed. These pogroms presaged the persecution and extermination of Europe's Jews, the betrayal of all civilised values, by National Socialist Germany.

And it was also on 9 November, in 1989, that the Berlin Wall fell.

The light in our German history cannot be separated from the dark chapters that preceded it.

That is why I wish to say to you in South Africa too: we Germans are aware of the abysses of violence and the delirium of racism. We are well aware of what people are capable of doing to others.

And that is why Nelson Mandela's legacy has a special and very particular significance for us in Germany. Mandela's legacy is reconciliation. And it was reconciliation that made it possible for us Germans to start afresh in unity and freedom.

However, we are well aware of this difference: Nelson Mandela gave forgiveness, we Germans received it. We received it from our partners in the world and in particular from our European neighbours.

The forgiveness we received is a gift, and it remains our responsibility to live up to this gift. In my view, Willy Brandt, whom I have already mentioned, is also a prime example of someone who exercised this responsibility. Perhaps you know the picture showing

Brandt on his knees in front of the monument to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a spontaneous gesture. That day, 7 December 1970, Brandt, the first Federal Chancellor to travel to Poland after the Second World War, asked for forgiveness for the crimes committed by Germans.

Today I want to tell you that the responsibility for the war and horrors unleashed by my country still pertains even now, almost half a century on from that gesture. There can be no end to it. That is why Germany will be an international partner for human rights and for a cooperative, rules-based order of peace, and against the spectre of aggressive nationalism which is once again raising its ugly head in some places.

Every nation looks in a very particular way at its own history. And every nation must learn lessons and find inner peace in its own particular way. I know that here in South Africa, too, the discussion about the past has not been concluded, by no means all the wounds are healed. How could they be?

But despite all the differences, we do at least have one important lesson learnt in common. Namely that the democracy in which we are living is not something that can be taken for granted; it was something which had to be fought for, with great courage and great sacrifices.

This also means that our democracies are never fully finished and never perfect; rather, it will always require courage and effort, our courage and our effort, to preserve them and carry them into the future.

What is more, democracy requires compromise. Compromise is often painful, very painful indeed. Who knows that better than you here in South Africa? It was only because you were prepared to make painful compromises, because the oppressed stretched out a hand to their oppressors, that the miracle of your peaceful transformation was at all possible. For some, no doubt, these compromises went too far; for some, the price doubtless seemed too high.

One person who observed this process very keenly is Pieter-Dirk Uys, the famous satirist. As Evita Bezuidenhout, he dared to criticise the apartheid regime, with a weapon against which it had no defences: humour. Even after the peaceful transition of power, Uys continued to travel across the country as Evita Bezuidenhout. It was 1999, shortly before the second democratic elections, when a young black activist shouted out from the audience to Evita Bezuidenhout, "Madam, we fought for freedom. All we got is democracy." The heckler meant it very seriously. In his view, it was all taking far too long, that difficult path of compromise. Pieter-Dirk Uys was greatly exercised by these sentences.

Why was he so struck by them? Pieter-Dirk Uys' life tells a South African-German story, a profoundly moving one. His father was an Afrikaner, his mother a Berlin-born Jew. As the harassment got worse following the National Socialists' seizure of power in Germany, she managed to escape to South Africa in 1936. Helga Bassel was a gifted pianist. Today her grand piano once again stands in Berlin, in the Jewish Museum, and her son appears there regularly.

So Pieter-Dirk Uys knew from his own family history the dreadful abysses which open up when individuals in society are robbed of their fundamental rights. And he probably could never have imagined that one day, in his country, in South Africa, there really would be equal rights for all.

That is why, esteemed guests: "We fought for freedom. All we got is democracy." The truth, in fact, is this: in the long run there can be no democracy without freedom, and no freedom without democracy. Whoever respects the civil liberties of every individual, whoever wants to protect them, has to be open to the vagaries of democracy.

Yes, it is hard work. The diversity that exists in a democratic society is always hard work.

That is what many people in my country are feeling, too. We are seeing the walls between different groups in society getting higher, and the tone is becoming rougher and more intransigent. We have been experiencing hatred and brutalisation – for a long time now, no longer just within the anonymity of the internet, but out on the streets. Racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia have not been overcome in Germany either; overcoming them remains a constant obligation, not only for politicians but for everyone in our society.

And I am aware that there are huge societal challenges here in South Africa, too. There is still poverty and inequality; jobs are short, and by no means everyone has the opportunity to acquire a good education and training. Here, too, there are walls between groups and between people.

To some, Nelson Mandela's and Desmond Tutu's rainbow society now seems nothing more than a wonderful dream. However, the dream of the rainbow nation is a dream worth fighting for. A dream which inspires others, including us.

Yes, on one hand it needs time; it needs patience; it probably needs more than one generation. That is true here in South Africa and it is no different in the reunited Germany.

On the other hand, though, it needs action; it needs courage. Many a wall has to be torn down. We have good experience of this in Germany. We tore down a huge wall, with courage and the desire for

freedom. But it is also true that other new walls have risen up between us.

That is why my wish for our two countries is that more walls fall – walls of inequality, walls of speechlessness and fury. Only if we remove these walls will we again see what binds us, rather than just what divides us.

Because this is a question people in both our nations are asking: what binds Zulu, Xhosa and Basotho, Indian and Coloured, descendants of the Dutch and British? What does it mean to live together in a country in which the vast majority of the people were oppressed for decades, for centuries?

What binds society in Germany which for decades was divided, in which people might speak the same language but have lived in different social systems? And the question of cohesion has become even louder since we took in hundreds of thousands of refugees, most of them from very different cultures.

I know that the question of diversity is a much more urgent one in a society like yours. But, speaking as an outsider, I can tell you that your coexistence in diversity is something for which the world admires your country.

This diversity produces a great deal of things which move people and establish ties between them, which can ultimately bring societies together: culture, music or art, science and enterprise, endless ideas and initiatives. I will be seeing much of this in your towns and cities during my trip.

I expect this visit to give me not only positive impressions of your country, but also ideas and opportunities to talk with you about how we can shape coexistence in diversity more peacefully, and how we can tackle the challenges facing our societies, both in Germany and South Africa.

I am thinking, for example, about migration and displacement, which shapes and dominates many – sometimes too many – debates about Africa in my country. South Africa's reality reminds us in Germany that Europe is not the only place to which people migrate or come when they are forced to flee their homes. Your country has itself taken in a great many people, from your neighbouring countries, from all across Africa. This achievement deserves respect, appreciation and support. Many people in Africa flee south to escape war and violence, but many also come here because they dream of a better life. In other words, you in South Africa are facing similar challenges to us in Germany.

I hope to be able to discuss this, too. Because, as you will have realised from my remarks here, we in Germany certainly do not have all the answers. Sometimes, indeed ever more often, I too, as Federal

President, find myself searching. And I believe we have a good deal to say to each other and a lot to learn from each other.

Saying that, I am very well aware that there has not always been this willingness to understand and to work together. Back in 1990, when Mandela came to Germany for the first time, by no means everyone regarded him as a friend. It is also true that Germany maintained economic relations with the apartheid regime for a long time. In 1996, my predecessor Roman Herzog welcomed Nelson Mandela on a state visit to Germany. At that time, both countries were looking to the future. The establishment of the German-South African Binational Commission was an expression of our conviction that Europe and Africa have a shared future.

Unfortunately, we have not always made use of the years since then to make progress towards common answers and solutions. As I see it, however, the debate in Germany now has changed. I see encouraging signals indicating a new openness in our encounters, something another of my predecessors, Horst Köhler, called for. Africa was a particular focus of his as Federal President and that continues to be the case today. His successors also made Africa a priority in their work.

At the end of October, I welcomed heads of state and government from seven African countries to Berlin, including your President Cyril Ramaphosa, whom I am looking forward to meeting again tomorrow in Cape Town.

Everyone present that evening agreed that we need new partnerships between Africa and Europe. The Compact with Africa initiated by Federal Chancellor Merkel in the G20 is an expression of just such a partnership, aimed at exploring new potential for investment, jobs and new forms of cooperation. Furthermore, there are strong signs that German businesses – many business representatives are with us today – want to become more engaged than in the past here in South Africa.

If new partnerships are to succeed, we also have to take a critical look at our perceptions of our partners. We Europeans still tend too much to think of Africa as one big continent marked by crises. There is no such thing as *one* Africa. Of course there isn't. My visit is intended in part to give people in Germany a more nuanced view of Africa, a continent of 54 states, with a fascinating history and an unimaginably diverse culture.

By the same token, there is no one Europe either. Europe, too, is diverse. The European Union alone comprises 28 states. Europe as a continent, like Africa, has more than 50 countries, countries with very different experiences and traditions. But also with very different problems. The European Union is being tested as it rarely has before.



It must find new answers – to the question of the openness of our societies, to the question of social cohesion in the age of globalisation, to the question of our willingness to cooperate, to strike peaceful compromises with neighbours and partners.

Whether in Europe or in Africa, we are living in eventful times. We are living through a period of great change. One can see this very clearly in your country: South Africa is daring to make a transformation, and for that I wish you confidence and great shared determination.

For we are embarking on a future that is open. Perhaps more open than ever before. And, if we look around the world, we see many examples which show us that change can take us in extremely different directions. It can be change that consolidates that which binds us, or it can be change that widens divides.

I hope that we will do all we can to ensure that it is change that brings us together.

That, while not forgetting the past, we will not be held hostage by it. That we transform the energy unleashed by change not into indignation or confrontation, but trust and a willingness to act.

That is my wish for your country, and for my country. That is my wish for the friendship between our nations!